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Sack Pig's Aperiodic Non-Life-Style

BY WILLIAM SAFIRE

CAVALRYMEN FROM Parthia, an ancient land southeast of the Caspian Sea, gained fame by shooting over their shoulders while running away; the technique became known as the *Parthian shot*, and is now often corrupted to *parting shot*. In this tradition of defiant retreat, President Reagan's recently departed national security adviser, Robert C. McFarlane, has left his imprint on military bureaucratise.

National Security Decision Directive 196 established the policy of using polygraphs, misnamed "lie detectors," ostensibly to protect our secrets from pilferage; in practice, it would inhibit all Government officials with access to secrets from talking to reporters.

This NSDD (pronounced *nizz-did*), drafted under McFarlane's supervision and recommended to the President at a meeting at which McFarlane was chairman, reads: "The National Security Planning Group also recommends that the U.S. Government adopt, in principle, the use of *aperiodic, non-life-style, CI-type* polygraph examinations for all individuals with access to USG sensitive compartment information, communications security information, and other special access program classified information."

In the words I have itali-

cized, the CI in *CI-type* stands for "counterintelligence," and the *-type* is a military-jargon suffix for "brand, style." ("Dogfood, Dehydrated, Kibble-type.") That's easy, and the acronym for National Security Planning Group will be a subject for closer study below. But *aperiodic* requires an immediate trip to Merriam-Webster's unabridged Third New International Dictionary (Permissive-type): *aperiodic* means "of irregular occurrence: not periodic," and is used all the time by cryptographers who want a certain herky-jerkiness in their codes to avoid telltale rhythms and make the encryption tougher to break. (Cryptographers write the codes that cryptologists study, just as lexicographers write dictionaries using the words that lexicologists study.)

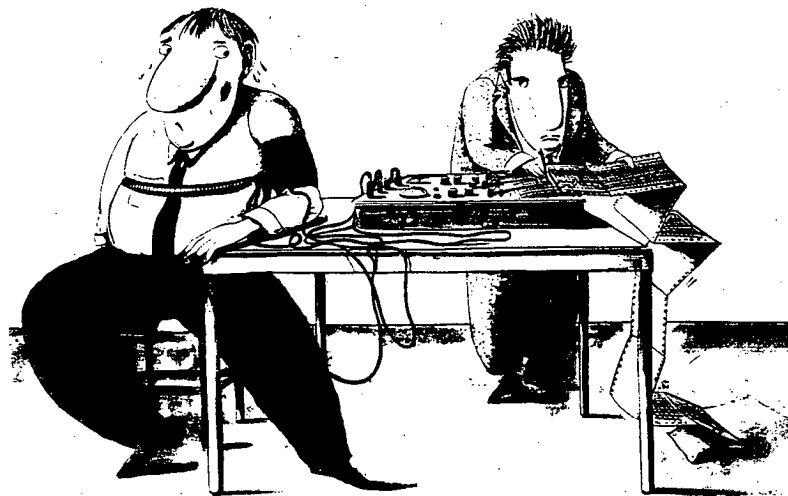
In regular, periodic testing, you could say, "It's Thursday, I have to take my Valium so I can beat the lie detector." However, in an *aperiodic* scheme, Cap the Truthful could skip the test on Thursday and hit you with his blood-pressure armband and little box the following Tuesday.

Non-life-style, to my knowledge, is an authentic neologism, and will be remembered as the McFarlane Contribution, much as *nuanced* and *caveated* will forever bear the situation-room

brand of Alexander M. Haig Jr. Its root, *life style*, was coined by the psychiatrist Alfred Adler in 1929 to denote a person's basic character, formed early in life, which governs that person's behavior later. In the revolution in sexual and living habits of the 1960's, when hippieness was next to godliness, the term was revived and changed to mean "way of life, style of living," and was derogated in a Spiro T. Agnew speech as a deadening conformity — "a life style that has neither life nor style."

According to a Reagan Administration official who demands anonymity, *non-life-style* means "nonintrusive" — that is, not intended to go into your love life, drinking habits or kinky avocations. This is intended to reassure the suspicious that the polygraph examination will be strictly businesslike: when you give an affirmative response to "Do you know Mata Hari?" the operator of the sweat-measuring paraphernalia will presumably refrain from asking how well you know her.

The predecessor to the compound adjective *non-life-style* was not *impersonal*, which means "not referring to any particular person"; rather, it was the more bureaucratic but accurate *nonpersonal*, "not dealing with matters a person considers private or intimate." If the directive



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were to be reduced to English, it might include a sentence like "From time to time, the Government may ask employees questions related to official duties but not dealing with their private lives." But officials who have great faith in the divining nature of machines do not talk that way.

High on the Hog

ONE OF MY INFORMANTS in the Pentagon, a merry person (never give away the sex of your source) who listens for leaks in E-ring elevators, called to predict that United States arms negotiators would soon cave in to the Russians at Geneva. The basis of his or her suspicion: he or she had overheard an arms-controlnik complaining of accepting a *pig in a poke*.

After an extensive stakeout at the drop site, the informant revealed (as you can tell, I expect a visit from Big Polly and am learning interrogese) that the overheard phrase was a *pig in a sack*; further probing induced the subject to refresh his (whoops! or her) recollection, and the whispered phrase became a *sack pig*.

With this accurate report in hand, Agent Lex turned to a source in DOD's telemetry encryption. (For the uninitiated: "DOD" is a Jamaican way of saying "father.") What, I demanded, was a *sack pig*, and did it mean that our boys in Geneva were buying a cat in a bag from the Russkies?

It was explained (note the passive voice, a must in interrogese) that the most common acronym in the Pentagon is *IG*. Anyone, down to the meanest subaltern, can be on an *IG*, or "Interdepartmental Group." Whenever you run into anybody across the river at State, you "have an *IG*," and can charge off a

Senior officials ("senior," I think, means over 28 years old, nearing pension benefits) when serving on an *IG*, turn them into a *SIG*, or "Senior Interdepartmental Group," which rates a car to transport you to the meeting. But *SIG*'s became too commonplace about a year ago, and the acronym atrophied, at least among the Star Wars superstars.

A SACPG, pronounced *sack pig*, is a Senior Arms Control Planning Group. It has no relationship to *earth pig*, current campus slang for a date that one is less than proud of, or to *pig in a poke*, a phrase that originated in Chaucer's "The Canterbury Tales," in which the Reeve speaks of "two pigges in a poke." Buying a pig in a poke, or a bag, is the mistake of paying for something without first inspecting it: a dishonest seller might substitute a different animal, such as a dog or a cat, for the pig. As early as 1380, John Wyclif wrote of "doggis in a poke" and also translated into English the French trope *acheter chat en sac*, "to buy a cat in a sac," which produced the later expression "to let the cat out of the bag."

However, the familiarity with *IG*'s has an effect on all Planning Groups, which are now called *PG*'s but pronounced *pigs*. When top brass get finished with a SACPG meeting, they hope to be invited to a *nisspig*, which is the National Security Planning Group. That can include the President, and is more frequently held than National Security Council meetings because attendance is not statutory and announcement of the meeting is not expected: anybody can be invited to a *nisspig* in the President's name.

I hope that lays the rumor of secret sellout to rest. But it raises another issue of the esthetics of bureaucratic terminology: somehow, it seems inappropriate, or even wrong, or worse yet, ugly, for a conference of our most distinguished leaders on subjects of immense significance to the fate of the nation — indeed, to the survival of humankind, formerly mankind — to be called a *nisspig*.

Subject recalls a similar problem at the beginning of the Carter Administration. In the Nixon-Ford era, major studies ordered by the President were called National Security Study Memorandums, or *nissims*; NSSM-1, for example, was the analysis of the possibility of an opening to China. When Henry A. Kissinger and his Nixonian followers cleared out desks for the Carter men to take over, it was felt that a change in the terminology was needed to signify a fundamental change in philosophy. Zbigniew Brzezinski decreed that his strategic studies would be called Presidential Study Memorandums, until somebody told him what the acronym would sound like, at which point he hurriedly amended his decree.

In like manner, let the nomenclature nomenklatura in the Pentagon and National Security Council come up with a less porcine name for great deliberations. Off the *sacpigs* and the *nisspigs*! ■